

Lincoln P. 161 P. 174

Ninety-fourth Year

Tros Tyriusque mihi nullo discrimine agetur

Vol. 189: No. 2

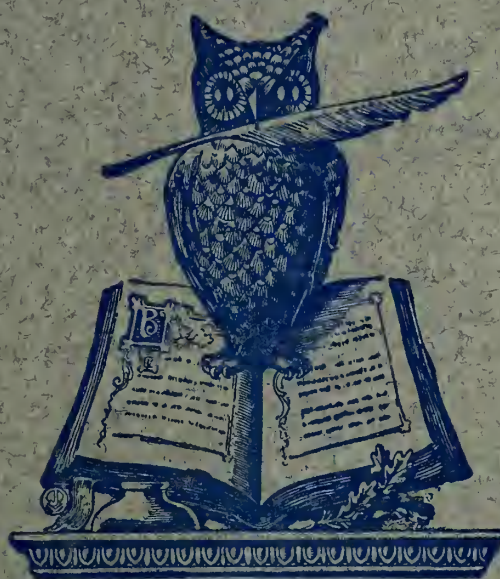
FOUR DOLLARS A YEAR

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

PRICE THIRTY-FIVE CENTS

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

EDITED BY GEORGE HARVEY



FEBRUARY 1909

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW PUBLISHING COMPANY
FRANKLIN SQUARE, NEW YORK



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/lincolndouglasde00tayl>

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

No. DCXXXIX.

FEBRUARY, 1909.

THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES AND THEIR APPLICATION TO PRESENT PROBLEMS.

BY HANNIS TAYLOR.

THE editor of the REVIEW has invited me to restate, within narrow limits, the essence of the questions involved in the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858, with a view to the application of the basic principle underlying them to present problems. In "the battle of giants," as the debates in question are generally called, two immortal tribunitian orators spoke really the last words in the bitter and prolonged contestation over slavery that culminated in the Civil War. No effort should now be made to revive the echoes of those last words, without some reference to the history of the conflict out of which they grew. Negro slavery, which originated in Africa, spreading to Spain before the discovery of America, and to America soon after, made its appearance on this continent the year before the "Mayflower" brought the Pilgrims to Plymouth Rock, when a Dutch ship landed twenty African slaves at Jamestown. In 1626, the Dutch West India Company began importing slaves into Manhattan, and by 1637 there were slaves in New England. A Royal African Company with the Duke of York, afterwards James II, as its President, was formed to monopolize the slave trade, which monarchs and ministries furthered to the utmost of their power.

VOL. CLXXXIX.—NO. 639. 11

Copyright, 1909, by THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW PUBLISHING COMPANY. All Rights Reserved

Despite the fact that the Crown forced the institution upon Virginia, that great Commonwealth had, prior to 1700, a smaller proportion of slave population than some of the Northern colonies. While before the Revolution all the colonies held negro slaves, at the close of the eighteenth century there was a strong anti-slavery feeling even in Virginia and North Carolina. Only in South Carolina and Georgia was slavery then looked upon with favor, owing, no doubt, to the fact that those States were mostly given to the cultivation of rice and indigo, which seemed to make slave labor indispensable. A sudden transformation took place, however, in 1783, when Whitney, a Connecticut school-master living in Georgia, invented the cotton-gin, whereby a slave, who by the old process could clean but five or six pounds of cotton a day, was enabled to clean 1,000 pounds a day. The cotton export of 189,316 pounds in 1791 had grown to 38,118,041 in 1804. Under such a stimulus, slavery at once ceased to be a passive and innocuous institution. Out of that condition of things grew up a contest between the Free and the Slave States for control of the Government, the South wishing to extend the area of slavery by the admission of new Slave States, the North seeking to confine the institution to the localities in which it already existed, while the abolitionist of the North wished to extinguish it altogether.

The first battle in the seventy years' war over slavery was fought in the Federal Convention of 1787, and the outcome was registered in three of the important compromises of the Constitution. While the Federal Convention was sitting at Philadelphia, the Continental Congress at New York was doing its last and one of its greatest pieces of work in framing the ordinance of 1787 for the organization and government of the public domain known as the Northwest Territory. Through the influence of Jefferson, slavery was prohibited by law in that Territory, while it was permitted in all Territories south of it. All but three of the United States which made the Confederation forbade the importation of slaves; and these three were North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. They insisted, while the Constitution was in the making, that the right to import slaves should continue until 1808. The North assented not only to that compromise, but also to the other two embodied in the three-fifths rule for slave representation in Congress and in

the fugitive slave clause. From that time, the opposing forces rested upon their arms under a rule which admitted a Slave State and a Free State by turns, so as to preserve the balance of power in Congress. Thus Vermont was counterbalanced by Kentucky, Tennessee by Ohio, Louisiana by Indiana, Mississippi by Illinois. In the same way, the admission of Alabama, in 1819, should have counterbalanced the admission of Maine in the following year; but, as Missouri was then applying for admission, the Southern members refused to admit Maine until it should be agreed to admit Missouri as a Slave State. After the admission of Louisiana in 1812, that portion of the Purchase north of the thirty-third degree took the name of the Missouri Territory, and within it slavery was unhindered in its growth. When, in 1818, the application of Missouri for admission as a Slave State presented for debate the status of slavery beyond the Mississippi, Jefferson, still alive, wrote: "The Missouri question is the most portentous which has ever threatened the Union. In the gloomiest hour of the Revolutionary War, I never had apprehensions equal to those which I feel from this source." The difficulty was finally adjusted by the famous Missouri Compromise of 1820, in which each section yielded a part of its demands. While Maine and Missouri were admitted into the Union, the latter as a Slave State, both Houses of Congress agreed that slavery should be prohibited forever in all other Territories north of 36° 30', Missouri's southern boundary. Thus the vast bulk of the Louisiana Purchase was dedicated to freedom. And yet, while limits were thus set to the extension of the area of slavery, the view was general that each State was absolutely sovereign over it within its own borders; that responsibility for it and its abuses ended in each State with its own citizens. Such was the real and practical undertone of the doctrine of State Sovereignty in the extreme form in which it was taught by Calhoun, an extreme which culminated at last in the absurdity of Nullification. Meanwhile, quite a contrary view became common in the North, largely through the influence of William Lloyd Garrison, who established in 1831 a weekly paper called "The Liberator," which was devoted to the entire and immediate abolition of African slavery in America. In demanding "immediate and unconditional emancipation," Garrison claimed that the question at issue was a national one; that the whole country, and not the South

only, was guilty in tolerating what he called a curse. Thus was the real issue finally made up.

The "irrepressible conflict," hushed for the moment by the Missouri Compromise, was revived when the proposal was made to annex Texas, capable of division into five Slave States, a question hotly discussed in the Presidential campaign of 1844. Van Buren, who had opposed annexation, was rejected by the Democratic party, and James K. Polk, who favored it, was nominated and elected; and in December, 1845, Texas was annexed by resolution of Congress, with the understanding that it might thereafter be divided into several Slave States. Florida had already been admitted as a Slave State in March of the same year. With the election of Polk, the North and South were finally arrayed in opposition to each other,—the slavery question became the "burning question" from that time down to the appeal to arms. The sequel of the annexation of Texas was the Mexican War, resulting in a vast acquisition of territory which came as an additional victory for slavery, because, as nearly all of it lay south of $36^{\circ} 30'$, it could become, under the terms of the Missouri Compromise, slave soil. A drawback existed, however, in the fact that in the new territory thus acquired slavery had been forbidden by Mexican law. That fact predisposed many who were not in general opposed to slavery against extending the institution thither. As an expression of that feeling David Wilmot, a Pennsylvania Democrat, introduced in the House in 1846 his famous Proviso, applying to any newly acquired territory the provision of the ordinance of 1787, "that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall be first duly convinced." While the Wilmot Proviso failed to pass, it called into existence the Free Soil party, formed by the union of anti-slavery Democrats and Whigs with the Abolitionists. When the Whig National Convention met at Philadelphia, June 7, 1848, it nominated Taylor and Fillmore without a platform, after resolutions affirming the Wilmot Proviso as a party principle had been repeatedly voted down. The Democratic National Convention, which had met at Baltimore, in May, after reviving the strict constructionist platform of 1840 and 1844, nominated Cass and Butler. The National Convention of Free-Soilers, which met at Buffalo in August, adopted a platform de-

claring in substance that Congress had no more power to make a slave than to make a king, and that there should be no more Slave States and no more slave Territories. Through the power of the Free-Soilers to draw the Democratic vote from New York, the Presidency passed to Taylor, who, despite the fact that he was a Louisiana slave-holder, was unflinching in his devotion to the Union. In 1846, Iowa was admitted, and in 1848 Wisconsin. Eager as Taylor was to bring California in before the question of slavery in that territory could be discussed in Congress, he urged the people to call a convention and organize a State. That they did in 1849; and, as the bulk of them were from the North, they framed a constitution prohibiting slavery, and applied for admission. In the crisis thus brought about, all eyes turned to the great Compromiser who had taken the country safely through the Missouri crisis of thirty years before. Clay now proposed that California should be admitted as a Free State; that any new States properly formed from Texas should also be admitted; that the Territories of Utah and New Mexico should be organized without the Wilmot Proviso (*i. e.*, that the people of each Territory should be left free to settle the question of slavery for themselves, according to the doctrine of squatter sovereignty); that a more rigid Fugitive-Slave Law should be enacted; and that the slave trade should be abolished in the District of Columbia. In the midst of it all Taylor died, on July 9th, 1850; Fillmore succeeded; and Webster became his Secretary of State. The compromise of 1850 became an accomplished fact, but Webster's support of it, which involved a desertion of the free-soil principles then dominant in New England, led to his overthrow. Massachusetts deserted him, and, when she elected a Senator for the full term, it was Charles Sumner, the representative of the united Democrats and Free-Soilers, who came to the Senate pledged to fight slavery to the death. The outcries that arose from the cruelties incident to the execution of the new and more stringent Fugitive-Slave Law were deepened, as the administration of Fillmore drew to a close, by the appearance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," whose stirring pathos touched the heart of the world.

Such was the state of the public mind when, in June, 1852, the Democratic Convention that met at Baltimore pledged that party to the observance of the Compromise of 1850; when the

Whig Convention that met in the same place in June endorsed the Compromise and the Fugitive-Slave Law; when the Free-Soil Democratic Convention that met at Pittsburg in August declared slavery to be a sin against God and a crime against man, and denounced the Compromise of 1850 and the two parties that supported it. After the triumph of Pierce and the ruin of the Whigs, the South was at a loss what to do for new slave territory now that the North had a preponderance in the Senate through the admission of California and the rapid growth of the Northwestern States, in which New England ideas had become predominant.

Passing over the attempt to buy Cuba, which failed at Ostend in 1854, we must look next at the scheme to acquire more territory into which to extend slavery in the region lying west of Missouri and Iowa, to the north of $36^{\circ} 30'$, and which, under the Missouri Compromise, was ever to be free soil. The project that contemplated the repeal of that famous compact proved successful, so far as legislation could go, when a bill, introduced in the Senate in December, 1853, to organize the Territory of Nebraska received the support of a sufficient number of Free-State Democrats to make it a success. A week later, a new bill was brought in, known as the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, which divided the region covered by the first into two Territories, one directly west of Missouri, to be called Kansas, and the other, north of this, to be called Nebraska. Thus, two States were to be opened to slavery instead of one, for the new bill distinctly declared that the Missouri Compromise had been swept away by the later Compromise of 1850. The passage of the bill in question was coupled with the contention that, as the population of the Territories had the natural right to decide for themselves the character of their own local institutions, Congress had no authority to vote slavery in or out for them. That idea, known as Squatter Sovereignty, was the invention of Stephen A. Douglas, a Northern Democrat, who proposed thus to lay bare the finest region of country open for settlement as a battleground between the slave-labor and the free-labor systems. When the Kansas-Nebraska question passed from Congress to Illinois in the fall of 1854, Douglas was called upon to defend his claim that the slavery question was forever settled by his invention of "popular sovereignty," which, he said, took it out of Congress

and gave it to the people of the Territories to decide as they pleased.

The time had now arrived when the anti-Nebraska party in Illinois were forced to look around for some champion who could meet "the little giant" in debate. His prowess in that line was admitted by all. In the entire field of American politics, no man equalled Douglas in the strategy and expedients of a palestric encounter of the oratorical kind. If he was lacking in originality and constructive logic, he more than made up for it by his facility in appropriating, by ingenious restatement, the thoughts and formulas of others. It has been said that "he was tireless, ubiquitous, unseizable. It would have been as easy to hold a globule of mercury under the finger's tip as to fasten him to a point he desired to evade." The David now chosen to meet him was Abraham Lincoln, who was born on the 12th day of February, 1809, in the midst of the most unpromising circumstances that ever witnessed the advent of a hero into this world. The years that followed his single term of service in Congress (1847 to 1849) had been for him years of work, study and reflection. While losing nothing of his genial humor, his character was taking on the dignity of a graver manhood. This man, whose sturdy and delicate integrity had won for him already the soubriquet of "Honest Old Abe," had begun to live more and more in the solitude of his office or his study. The inner light of his great mission had begun to burn within him. His principal weapon was direct and unswerving logic; his fairness of statement and generosity of admission had long been proverbial. Disdaining mere quibbles, he pursued lines of concise reasoning to maxims of constitutional law and political morals. His quaint originality, his aptness of phrase, his clearness of definition, his philosophic vision and poetical fervor often culminated in flights of genuine eloquence. When Douglas and Lincoln met, the subtle keenness of the sword of Saladin, that could carve muslin as it floated in the air, was to be contrasted with the temper of the sword of Richard of the Lion Heart that could sever a bar of iron at a blow. In opening a great speech at the State Fair at Springfield on October 3rd, Douglas said: "I will mention that it is understood by some gentlemen that Mr. Lincoln of this city is expected to answer me." Twelve days later, they met again at Peoria, an occasion

made memorable by the fact that, when Lincoln returned home, he wrote out and published his speech. In that model of brevity, directness, exact and lucid historical statement, we find not only the argument of the hour, but the premonition of the broader issues into which the new struggle was soon to expand. The time had come when Douglas was to be told that slavery was not a local but a national question, that any peculiar institution in any locality that affects the welfare of all is the common concern of all. Lincoln's expressions on that subject were the first articulate outcry of the new national spirit, just after the nation awoke to a full sense of its oneness. He said:

"The doctrine of self-government is right,—absolutely and eternally right,—but it has no just application as here attempted. Or perhaps I should rather say that whether it has such just application depends upon whether a negro is not, or is, a man. If he is not a man, in that case he who is a man may, as a matter of self-government, do just what he pleases with him. When the white man governs himself, that is self-government; but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government—this is despotism. . . . Let us readopt the Declaration of Independence, and the practices and policy which harmonize with it. Let North and South—let all Americans—let all lovers of liberty everywhere—join in the great and good work. If we do this, we shall not only have saved the Union, but we shall have so saved it as to make and keep it forever worthy of the saving. We shall have so saved it that the succeeding millions of free, happy people, the world over, shall rise up and call us blessed to the latest generations."

Such was the prelude to the more famous Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858.

Deep and wide-spread as had been the slavery agitation incident to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and the consequent civil war in Kansas, an event, entirely unexpected so far as the public at large was concerned, suddenly occurred which doubled its intensity. Two days after Buchanan's inauguration, the Supreme Court of the United States announced its famous decision in the Dred Scott case which originated in the idea that, under our Federal system, a temporary residence in a Free State or Territory could work the emancipation of a slave, under the doctrine laid down by Lord Mansfield in *Somerset's* case. By the time it reached the court of last resort, it had become so interlaced with pending political problems that, in the words of Mr. Justice Wayne, "the case involves private

rights of value, and constitutional principles of the highest importance, about which there had been such a difference of opinion that the peace and harmony of the country required the settlement of them by judicial decision." In a word, the Supreme Court, composed of nine judges, seven of whom were Democrats and five from Slave States, felt called upon to transfer the question of the legality of slavery in the Territories from the political to the judicial arena. The outcome was embodied in the conclusions that the Missouri Compromise Act was unconstitutional, slaves being private property with which Congress had no right to interfere; that it was the duty of Congress not to prohibit, but to protect, slavery in the Territories; that no slave, or descendant of slaves, could be a citizen of the United States; that, as slaves were not persons, but property, the owner of them could take them into any part of the Union just as he could take any other kind of property. Thus did Douglas's doctrine of Squatter Sovereignty receive its death blow from the judicial arbiter to whom he was pledged to bow. To dissent was to give mortal offence to the South; to concur was to give mortal offence to the North. Thus handicapped, Douglas met his indomitable opponent in the famous debates that occurred in Illinois between July and November, 1858.

In pressing upon Douglas his charge of a political conspiracy to nationalize slavery,—alleging that his "don't-cure" policy was but the convenient stalking-horse under cover of which a new Dred Scott decision would make slavery lawful everywhere,—Lincoln said:

"He says he 'don't care whether it is voted up or down' in the Territories. I do not care myself, in dealing with that expression, whether it is intended to be expressive of his individual sentiments on the subject, or only of the national policy he desires to have established. It is alike valuable for my purpose. Any man can say that who does not see anything wrong in slavery, but no man can logically say it who does see a wrong in it; because no man can logically say he don't care whether a wrong is voted up or voted down. . . . That is the real issue. That is the real issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time; and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity and the other is the divine right of kings."

In assailing his popular-sovereignty principle, Lincoln declared it:

"The most arrant Quixotism that was ever enacted before a community. Does he mean to say that he has been devoting his life to securing to the people of the Territories the right to exclude slavery from the Territories? If he means to say so, he means to deceive; because he and every one knows that the decision of the Supreme Court, which he approved and makes especial ground of attack upon me for disapproving, forbids the people of a Territory to exclude slavery. This covers the whole ground from the settlement of the Territory till it reaches the degree of maturity entitling it to form a State constitution."

In the meeting at Freeport, Lincoln put Douglas to the crucial test by calling upon him to answer four carefully prepared questions, the second of which was this: "Can the people of a United States Territory, in any lawful way against the wish of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits, prior to the formation of a State constitution?" When Lincoln's friends, while urging him not to put that question, said, "If you do, you can never be Senator," he answered, "Gentlemen, I am killing larger game; if Douglas answers, he can never be President, and the battle of 1860 is worth a hundred of this." When Douglas did answer, he said:

"I answer emphatically, as Mr. Lincoln has heard me answer a hundred times from every stump in Illinois, that in my opinion the people of a Territory can, by lawful means, exclude slavery from their limits, prior to the formation of a State constitution. Mr. Lincoln knew that I had answered that question over and over again. He heard me argue the Nebraska bill on that principle all over the State in 1854, in 1855 and in 1856, and he has no excuse for pretending to be in doubt as to my position on that question. It matters not what way the Supreme Court may hereafter decide as to the abstract question whether slavery may or may not go into a Territory under the Constitution; the people have the lawful means to introduce it or exclude it, as they please, for the reason that slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere unless it is supported by local police regulations. Those police regulations can only be established by the local Legislature, and if the people are opposed to slavery they will elect representatives to that body who will by unfriendly legislation effectually prevent the introduction of it into their midst. If, on the contrary, they are for it, their legislation will favor its extension. Hence, no matter what the decision of the Supreme Court may be on that abstract question, still the right of the people to make a Slave Territory or a Free Territory is perfect and complete under the Nebraska bill."

In reply, Lincoln said:

"The first thing I ask attention to is the fact that Judge Douglas constantly said, before the decision, that whether they could or not was a question for the Supreme Court. But, after the Court has made the decision, he virtually says it is not a question for the Supreme Court, but for the people. . . . I pass to consider the real constitutional obligation. Let me take the gentleman who looks me in the face before me, and let me suppose that he is a member of the Territorial Legislature. The first thing he will do will be to swear that he will support the Constitution of the United States. His neighbor by his side in the Territory has slaves and needs Territorial legislation to enable him to enjoy that constitutional right. Can he withhold the legislation which his neighbor needs for the enjoyment of a right which is fixed in his favor in the Constitution of the United States, which he has sworn to support?"

Lincoln made no mistake as to the effect of Douglas's answer upon his political fortunes,—with the whole South, and with a few prominent politicians of the North, it served to put him outside the pale of party fellowship. As compared with this, his Lecompton revolt had been a venial offence. Soon after the Charleston Convention, Judah P. Benjamin said:

"Sir, it has been with reluctance and sorrow that I have been obliged to pluck down my idol from his place on high, and to refuse to him any more support or confidence as a member of the party. . . . We accuse him for this, to wit: that having bargained with us upon a point upon which we were at issue, that it should be considered a judicial point; that he would abide the decision; that he would act under the decision, and consider it a doctrine of the party; that, having said that to us here in the Senate, he went home, and under the stress of a local election his knees gave way, his whole person trembled. His adversary stood upon principle and was beaten; and lo! he is the candidate of a mighty party for the Presidency of the United States."

On that subject Lincoln with quaint humor once said:

"All the anxious politicians of his party, or who have been of his party for years past, have been looking upon him as certainly at no distant day to be the President of the United States. They have seen, in his round, jolly, fruitful face, post-offices, land offices, marshalships and cabinet appointments, chargéships and foreign missions, bursting and sprouting out in wonderful exuberance ready to be laid hold of by their greedy hands. On the contrary, nobody has ever expected me to be President. In my poor, lean, lank face, nobody has ever seen that any cabbages were sprouting out. These are the disadvantages, all taken together, that the Republicans labor under. We have to fight this battle upon principle, and principle alone."

The opposing principles involved in the famous debate of 1858 were so sharply defined that they may be restated within a narrow compass. Against the contention of Douglas that under the doctrine of "popular sovereignty" even a question so grave as human slavery might be localized stood Lincoln's contention that all local questions that affect all are the common concern of all. No serene and impartial student of the Constitution will ever for a moment doubt that the conclusions reached by the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case were in perfect accord with the compromises of the Constitution as the Fathers had made them. On the other hand, no such student of the history of humanity will ever for a moment doubt that such conclusions were in sharp conflict with what Seward called "the higher law"—that is, the law on the subject of slavery as it had been settled by the consensus of the civilized nations. At the end of the Civil War, "the higher law" triumphed once and forever when the results of the Dred Scott case were wiped out by the adoption of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. When we consider the application of the basic principle involved in the famous debate of 1858 to present problems, we should never for a moment forget that Lincoln's contention, that all local questions that affect all are the common concern of all, has become the corner-stone of our new national life. The first application made of that principle by the reunited nation was in the destruction of a peculiar social institution within the Territory of Utah which conflicted with the general principles of our civilization. Until a man can take that principle into his heart in its fulness, he can never be a patriot as Lincoln was a patriot. When destiny called upon him to secure the supreme interests of all by preserving the life of the Union, like a Titan he struggled and triumphed, and like a protomartyr died. In the crisis of the conflict, when the capital of the nation was in danger, he appeared upon the parapet of Fort Stevens, on July 12th, 1864, as one of its defenders. In his account of the incident, General Wright, then commanding in the suburbs of Washington, has said: "I entreated the President not to expose his life to the bullets of the enemy; but he seemed oblivious to his surroundings." As the battle progressed, it became painfully evident that a very handsome residence near by, occupied by Confederate sharpshooters, had to be

destroyed. As it was of considerable value, Mr. Lincoln was consulted, and as commander-in-chief he gave the order for its destruction by shot and shell. There and then, for the first and last time in the history of the Republic, a President of the United States actually exercised authority as commander-in-chief. The document in Lincoln's own handwriting attesting that fact, after being buried for more than forty years in the archives of Congress, was first made public at Fort Stevens on May 30th, 1908, when the writer,—through the kindness of Senator Henry W. Blair, who alone knew of its existence,—was able to read it as a part of his Memorial Day address. Perhaps in the time to come some artist will portray this, the most imposing scene in the life of Lincoln, when, as commander-in-chief of the armies of the United States, he stood in the thick of the fight upon the ramparts of Fort Stevens on that 12th of July, sustaining and directing the defenders of the nation's capital and the nation's life. As time goes on, he will be viewed through the lengthening distance by a grateful posterity in the North and in the South, in the East and in the West, as he stood battling for the life of the Union in the twilight of that fateful day, transfigured on the horizon and touched by the light of its dying glory.

HANNIS TAYLOR.

BANNER MEMORIES.

A POEM FOR ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY.

BY NATHAN HASKELL DOLE.

THE lone ship plunges on her trackless way,
Her guide the faithful needle pointing North.
The sleepless watchman, silent, gazes forth
To sight the changes of the night and day.
The immeasurable waste of blue or gray,
Its fluent hills and hollows splashed with foam,
With rainbow-tinted flowers of flashing spray,
Lies cold and solemn 'neath heaven's circling dome.
For hour on hour no bird's wing flecks the sky;
The same monotonous sweep of barren brine
Wearies the homesick voyager's mournful eye
Which yearns to catch some heart-consoling sign.

"A sail! a sail!" rings out the thrilling cry.
Sudden athwart the keen horizon-line
Struggles a dim, indefinite cloud to view,
Half-blending, half-contrasting, with the blue,
But momentarily enlarging, till, at last,
Full-rigged with canvas straining at each mast—
A vision of beauty in wind-cleansed dazzling white—
A deep-hulled ship dawns full in sight,
Rising and dipping on those mountainous seas.
Then, if perchance that ship bears at the height
Of swaying mast-top, wide-spread on the breeze,
The traveller's home flag, faded though it fly,
He feels that he must fall upon his knees
In adoration of its majesty.

It stirs his pulses, fills his eyes with tears,
Makes him forget his grief and loneliness;
It wakes the sailors' voices into cheers,
Has magic power to kindle and to bless!

What is the magic of the flag?
What influence holds
Within its graceful folds,
That, though it be a smoke-grimed rag,
Faded and frayed and tattered,
Strife-eager men will die
To hold it high
Before the cannon belching shotted fire;
And, if it drop
From out the color-sergeant's hands,
The hero marching next will stop
Only to seize with death desire
Its blood-stained staff all shattered,
And lift it onward for the following bands
To get fresh courage by?
How can its alternating stripes
Of white and red,
Its star-sown field of azure,
Unite in one enthusiasm none may measure
A hundred varying human types—
Those who have fled
From Persecution's cruel trial,
Or who in Freedom's cause their blood have shed,
Russian and Hebrew, Finn and Persian;
And those who save, by rigid self-denial,
The meagre sum to justify desertion
Of Fatherland's intolerance unpaternal;
And those who have escaped Conscription's curse,
Or, what is worse,
Some bitter internecine War's
Wild aftermath infernal;
And those whose ancestors
Came hither for Religion's sake
With lofty zeal to make

A Paradise of God
Within a primitive wilderness untrod?
What is the magic power
Which makes its beauty lovelier than a flower?

It is the symbol of a majesty,
A vast idea, a concept that appeals
To ignorant and to learned equally,
To every heart that feels.
It is the gonfalon of Liberty;
Its bright escutcheon stands
To differentiate from other lands
Our home-land—land where we were born,
Or new-born, into Freedom's light.
Its mission is to welcome or to warn—
To stream across the sky,
Portentous as a comet,
That fierce aggression's might
May read the threat of vengeance from it;
Or, softly beaming with effulgence bright,
To feed the imagination of the young
With hope and fervor for the Right
And love for every nation, every tongue.
Its thirteen alternating bars
Rehearse the legend of a Nation's birth:
The glorious Red
Is symbol of the patriotic life-blood shed,
Whose flower of fame we have inherited;
The White is Peace, Good-will to Earth;
The growing constellation
Of dominating Stars
Is hieroglyphic
And typifies the increase of the Nation
From Lakes to Gulf, Atlantic to Pacific.

I stood within the marble-vaulted hall,
Where, in tricolored groups assembled,
The battle banners, bullet-torn,
With years of service worn,
Mantled with never-dying glory,